

LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN PAKISTAN

Training Report by Waqas Ramzan from Blind Help Project

Part 1: What I Learnt?

Internet is a decentralized network of networks spread across the globe. It connects over half of the entire world population together. It is where socialization, education, entertainment, employment, shopping and other affairs of the life happens in 21st century. Such a complex and giant system requires principles and protocols to stay sustainable. Considering the highly distributed and open nature of Internet, there cannot be a central governing body having authority over every part of it.

Internet Governance:

Internet governance is the development and application of shared principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures by thousands of stakeholders that shape the evolution of the Internet. These stakeholders are from Governments, the private sector and civil society. They sit together in global, regional, and national Internet Governance Forums (IGF) to discuss about ever rising matters pertaining to internet.

Leadership:

The discussions on internet governance forums are sparked by the leaders of various sectors. Taking this into account, we had an interactive session on Persuasion Skills and network Building after the introductory presentations.

A leader is the one who has a dream about bringing a change, and the drive to turn that dream into reality. For this, the leader creates network and persuades to push the drive forward. This was my key takeaway from the leadership session. This was followed by a cross disability group activity of aiming to build highest tower from thin and straight noodles. The moment where we practiced newly learned skills.

Digital Ecosystem of Pakistan:

In context of Pakistan, the digital eco system is robust. We are among top ten nations with highest number of internet users. When it comes to freelancing and preferred outsourcing destination, Pakistan stands in top five. In internet governance, Pakistan is the pioneer in establishing the national school of internet governance. In terms of our focused segment of accessibility, Pakistan is the initiator of Accessibility Standing Group of Internet Society.

Legislation and Policies in Pakistan:

It is a common saying that Pakistan is one of the highly legislative countries. Proving that, there are various clauses with regards to digital accessibility for persons with disabilities in multiple policies. There is surely a need for careful consideration of specifics while devising the policies. The clause in the Digital Pakistan Policy says that government websites should be accessible according to Web Content Accessibility Guideline. They did not add up to level

A.A. Due to these four words, even if one image has alternative text, the entire website is compliant to law. Moreover, the implementation of these policies is the area where we are seriously lacking.

Privacy and Cyber Security

Internet is commonly considered as a medium to get the information. However it is always exchange of information. This session gave us the glimpse into paths and destination where our information travels and gets stored when we browse the internet. It ranges from service provider to website server to law enforcement and beyond. It was quite scary and highly enlightening session. My point of view that when a device is connected to internet, no file is protected or 100% confidential got validated. We also learnt handy techniques to make our digital assets a little safer.

Fellowship and Grant Opportunities:

There are numerous fellowship opportunities available to participate in internet governance trainings and discussion forums. We were presented with comprehensive overview of global and regional events. The esteemed speakers took this to next level and gave us hands on exercise in applying for these grants and fellowship opportunities. The commonly asked questions were shown and best approach to answer was advised with real life examples.

Part 2: What are my Commitments?

First, I would like to extend my warm gratitude to each and every individual involved in ideation, planning, execution, supporting and funding this magnificent training program. Teaching Internet governance to leaders with disabilities is indeed the need of the hour. As internet is where most of our day-to-day affairs run. The leaders of persons with disability must be equipped with knowledge and skills to insure digital rights of PWDs. The three days comprehensive program provided us with knowledge, tools and network to get involved in discussions, decision making, legislation and implementation of accessibility and other digital rights of PWDs.

Being an inclusion activist, I am more motivated to advocate for accessibility and digital rights of PWDs. I am a web developer, and the program has made insuring equally accessible for all my utmost responsibility in all my projects. I am deeply committed to study the accessibility and digital rights related policies of Pakistan, recommend enhancement where possible and push for implementation where in my capacity. This is a lifelong commitment from my side.